

The Introduction:

Allison and I traveled with a team of seven people to Nairobi and finally to Sudan to carry out ministry work. It was to be the first of many trips for our church, Fellowship Bible. This trip was important for Allison and I as it was our first time to visit the country where we will soon be living. The following information, stories and reports are a culmination of what we saw and felt on the ground in Sudan.

The Team:

We had a team total of seven people. It included four men and three women. Two were Dallas Theology grads, one committed to bring clean water to people across Sudan, three future 'career' missionaries, one in marketing, one full-time church missions assistant. Some were married and some not, two attended as a couple. Together, the group made up a great dynamic that worked well on the team, providing leadership, younger and older points of view, business and administrative views, community development, Biblical perspective, and spiritual perspectives.

Around Town in Malakal:

Fellowship Bible Church intends on making a long-term relationship and impact with the people and town of and around Malakal. Allison and I will most likely be living there in the near future as well. With these considerations, we took a few opportunities to visit various locations around town.

We visited the Malakal hospital, which is the only location within hundreds of miles with anything close to real medical care. The burn unit consisted of mosquito nets and pain medication. They also had some kind of ointment and plastic to cover the burns. Their TB ward had no isolation features. This building was actually fairly close to the public road and we were allowed to walk right into the room where the patients were laying. The most common surgery performed is c-sections. They do have a fairly advanced surgical room, which has backup power for when there is no electricity from the town (every day) and is maintained by the Doctors of the World.



Allison and I had the opportunity to visit the SIC (Sudan Interior Church) compound, which was built by SIM. They have three permanent buildings, a straw church and two straw buildings for school. In the near future, the permanent buildings, built over 40 years ago, will be renovated into a livable condition. Soon after, an office building, with communications and electricity, will be built.

The water distribution network built by the British in the 1920s is still being used today. Water is pumped from the Nile and directly sent into town without any filtering or purification. Almost all transportation of people and goods is accomplished with boats and barges on the Nile. The roads around this area, and most of Sudan are far too poor for transportation and commerce. Because of its location on the Nile, Malakal is located very well to receive goods from Khartoum. It is the first major town in South Sudan, when traveling from the north. Almost all goods originate from Khartoum.

We had the opportunity to visit, what we would call, the suburbs of Malakal. The undeveloped area to the South of town has been plotted by the local government and is available for purchase for personal or commercial use. It is almost exclusively used by people to build their homes. There are many people who do not own the land, but still build a tukul and live there until they are kicked out by someone who purchases the land. ALARM has purchased an entire block of plots to build their future facilities. The location, though currently in the middle of no where, is actually very strategically located. The plots are located at what will be a major crossroads in the very near future, possibly within the year. When dry season comes, contractors will begin the process of building paved roads from Malakal to other major cities south of town, reaching all the way to Juba. This road passes right by ALARM's property.

Teaching Pastors:

The main focus of our visit to Malakal was to conduct a pastors' conference to continue their education in the area of church planting and discipleship. We had also intended to have a conference for the women in leadership, commonly the pastors' wives, to educate them in the areas of:

- Being a Godly Woman
- Mentor Relationships
- How Jesus Related to Women
- Introduction to evangelism

Unfortunately, due to a miscommunication, the women's conference did not occur on this trip.

For the men's conference we used the model of the original church found in Acts. We used the following topics as an outline:

- Intro: The Great Commission – Acts 1 & Acts 2:47
- Pentecost: Gift Based Ministry – Act 2:1-13
- Peter's Sermon: Empowering Leadership – Acts 2:14-36
- Passionate Spirituality & Worship – Acts 2:37-end
- The Lame Healed: Need Oriented Evangelism – Acts 3:1-10
- Peter's Second Sermon: Supremacy of Christ – Acts 3:11-26
- Righteousness & the Church: High Standard of Leadership & Christians – Acts 5:1-15
- Persecution: Realities of Following Christ – Acts 4, Acts 5:40-42

While these topics created some very interesting conversation, some had never even considered or heard discussed, we also found that other topics of need came up throughout the week. The chief topic that came up was unity among the churches. We believe that through the strengthening of the universal church and leadership of the local church, we will empower and encourage these leaders to champion new leadership and plant new churches. At the end of the day, our goal is not new churches, but new believers in the universal church, in turn creating new local churches as the body grows.



Taylor & Elijah talk between sessions.

Because of the length of the men's conference and the availability of the Fellowship women during the day, we were able to take advantage of some of the topics they had prepared and each of them had the

opportunity to teach during the men's conference. In the evening, the women found an opportunity to teach English to some local adults. There were two classes, separated by their language proficiency.

One side note; some of those attending the conference were actually 'evangelist.' This is the title usually reserved for leadership in the church who were not ordained and officially pastors. In the past, churches actually sent out these evangelists to outlying towns and villages, which do not have large enough bodies of believers for their own churches, but are strengthened through the long visits by the evangelists. Often times the leadership of churches in these smaller areas were not pastors, but simply an appointed person of leadership. Occasionally the evangelists would visit a larger village and invite these leaders of smaller villages for teaching.

The Fruit: During our last day of teaching, the pastors came together and created a list of things they would begin to do in order to create unity among the local and global church. This list, and the initiative of the pastors to come together and create this list of ways to unify the church was the 'fruit' of our teaching that week. God was glorified that day by the unity of the church.



Pastors' Conference Group Photo.

The State of the Church:

With the topic of unity coming up so often, it became apparent that there are not only issues of the individual church, but of the universal church in Sudan, more specifically Malakal. We had a discussion with one individual who described how different churches thrived or died under the persecution during the wars. Some areas had massive growth, while other areas, like Malakal, did not fair as well during these times of persecution.

We witnessed a broad variation of education both Biblically and secondary. Many pastors have formal Biblical training, mostly in Kenya during exile, while not having any secondary education.

Many of the church services are conducted in tribal languages. This is a great source of contention because it limits the congregation to tribal races. So you end up having congregations that are made up of only Dinka, Nuer or other tribes. In a sense, this is seen as a form of racism because it excludes other tribes that do not speak the language the service is held in. A few of the pastors who seemed to hold influence among the group often encouraged others to hold services in languages common to the area, like Arabic and occasionally English. Some areas even have trade languages that are still tribal in nature, but in Malakal it is usually Arabic.

The leadership of the church is, in my opinion, not addressing some major issues (sins) of its congregation. One issue is that of polygamy, which even church leadership practice sometimes. I was told a story about a pastor who first took his brother's wife, because he had passed away. At a later date, he decided to pick a wife for himself, not really taking into consideration that he already had a wife (they had children together). At a later date, after already having been married to two wives for a number of years, he was approached by another pastor and encouraged to release one of them. Soon after he let go of his brother's wife. The perception of the church body, throughout Sudan, is that strict moral behavior is reserved only for leadership and elders and is not required of lay people. As of right now, being a Christian in Malakal only requires you to attend church on Sunday. Most pastors have multiple jobs and are not able to Shepard their flock. This is simply a matter of necessity as most of them do not preach on and take a tithe. Even if they did, it would not be enough to fund the pastor. But this is another issue that needs to be addressed, tithing. Lastly, the Biblical view of divorce needs to be addressed. In this area of Africa, purchasing your wife from her family is still the common means of obtaining your wife. It is also a major source of income for the bride's family. If the bride is not able to bare children or any other defect type reason, the husband can return her to the family and recoup his expenses from them.

I hope that after living in and among the people in Sudan, Allison and I could come along side these leaders to help address the issues in a Biblical way while doing so in a culturally appropriate manner.

The State of Malakal and the People of Malakal:

Walking around town everyone felt very safe. In town, the people were almost exclusively male. The southern part of town, which we affectionately came to refer to as the suburbs, is where people had small plots of land they could purchase in town and build a tukul. This is where the women and children stayed for most of the day. ALARM has purchased a section of lots at a discounted rate where they hope to build tukuls for housing visitors and buildings for projects to be based.



Taylor takes photos after church in Malakal.

Future Relationships & Trips:

There is a huge need in Sudan, that is undeniable. The need is both spiritual and physical in nature. As of right now, anything and everything has potential. They are starting with nearly nothing. From the physical standpoint, Elijah Riak Chol, ALARM's Upper Nile Director, had a few suggestions and ideas for projects that could be done in and around Malakal. During our next trip to teach the pastors, he suggested we focus on some more practical pastoral techniques, including how to preach and to continue teaching on discipleship.

In the community development realm, he made the following suggestions:

- Orphanage (the only orphanage is run by the Muslim church)
- Helping the Disabled (mostly from the wars)
- Clean Water (#1 source of disease)
- 'Christian Institution' (pastors strongly pleaded for non-denominational teaching center)
- Medical Team (suggested short-term medical teams, of all kinds & dental)

Atar:

After seeing the team off to Nairobi, Nate Killoren (he and his wife, Ginna, plan to move to Sudan with SIM as well) and I stayed in Malakal to travel to Atar. Later that day we secured a private boat ride, for the special white-man price of \$300, down the Nile to Atar. The ride was about 2.5 hours and approximately 20 miles. During the last 30 minutes of our trip, we experience a downpour. Thankfully, the boat driver had a nice new tarp for us to use and we stayed mostly dry. In the pouring rain, we were greeted by Yacob and his wife. I had been worried that we would have a walk ahead of us in order to reach the compound. It turns out the whole Atar village is right on the banks of the river. It turned out to be less than 100 yards from the bank.

The SIM missionaries had set up two safari tents for Nate and I. These accommodations were much nicer than we were expecting. The canvas covering the tent from the sun extended over the tent enough for us to sit down in the rain for a chat before dinner. We were fed very well and ate some kind of meat at almost every meal. Many meals had an Ethiopian flavor to them as the missionaries were from Ethiopia. Thankfully, we had thought ahead and brought some bottled water with us from Malakal. The missionaries filtered their own water from the Nile and I would have felt perfectly fine drinking that water as well.

Over the next few days Nate and I toured the village and met with people in the village representing the GOSS (Government of Southern Sudan). On our last day, we were visited by the captain and lieutenants of the SPLA (Sudan People's Liberation Army). They welcomed us to Atar, but we later found out that they were looking into us because they had heard we were at the airport (a long grass field) taking photos. Airports are very strategic in war torn areas.

The thrust of the ministry work in Atar is through BELC (Basic Education Learning Centers). This is one of the major parts of 'Rebuilding Southern Sudan: Church & Nation' SIM Sudan is working on in the Upper Nile State. Just last year there were a number of missionaries who shared the teaching responsibilities, but since the fighting in November of 2007, most of them have not been able to return because of visa problems. The Kenya government makes it very difficult to have Nigerians pass through their country because of the drug trade originating in Nigeria. School was out of session, not because it was summer break, but for the harvest season. The Atar BELC has mostly adult students of all ages. Many of them are influential people in the town of Atar. Some are elders of the village, some hold more official status with GOSS and some are leaders in the local churches (Presbyterian, Catholic & SIC).

I'm reminded of the huge influence NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) have the opportunity to have in Sudan during these times. The example that comes to mind is the SIM doctor working in Doro. He has been working in Africa for 20 years and has done and seen it all. He is very involved in the medical future of Sudan and has the opportunity to influence policies and otherwise the future of medicine in all of Southern Sudan because of the people he is able to influence in the various 'ministries' of government he is exposed to.



We were constantly reminded of the fact that we were outsiders. Everywhere you went you heard the word *kawaja*, which means 'white man' or 'foreigner' as the Ethiopian missionary was often referred to by this same word. One day Nate and I ventured to the far southern end of the village. By the time we reached the last tukul, a crowd had gathered around us. In a village this remote, we were likely the first white people some of them had ever seen. The next day there was a small crowd of children gathered at the door to our compound, just watching us. At one moment, I noticed the two young children at the

door were looking away. I took this opportunity to sneak up on them to get close. I made it all the way to the door and knelt down right in front of a very young boy who was maybe only 3 years old. His sister was standing next to him, also in front of me. Both of them turned and I was less than two feet from them, face-to-face. The girl just smiled, but her brother immediately started to cry and ran back 15 feet to a few other children down the muddy path. The other children and his sister started to laugh and he stopped and cracked a smile. It was certainly this boy's first exposure to a *kawaja*.

Nate and I would often refer to our expenses as receiving the '*kawaja* discount.' There are quite a few NGOs in Malakal and the Sudanese people have become wise to the fact that they can afford a much higher rate for any product or service than they normally charge.

Taylor Martyn